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With 1,000 episodes now under its belt, Monday Night Raw may not be the longest running weekly episodic television show in history as it claims, but it can call itself the most noteworthy television wrestling show ever in the United States.

A lot has changed, more than just postage and gas prices, since January 11, 1993. That night, the former two-hour Prime Time Wrestling show on the USA Network, featuring Bobby Heenan and Gorilla Monsoon in studio pitching to arena matches, was replaced by a new concept show. Ratings for Prime Time Wrestling had fallen down to the mid-2s each week. That new show was called Monday Night Raw.

The original Raw was a weekly one hour show that aired live, at least some weeks, from the Manhattan Center, which held 1,100 people at the time, a small building that was a short walk away from Madison Square Garden. The building later became the home of Ring of Honor major shows in the market.

Raw was not the immediate flagship show, although it was given a big promotional push as a new form of wrestling show because it was live. Prior to that time, WWF had rarely done live television shows, although when they did, such as the Royal Rumble from Hamilton, ONT, in 1988, or the MTV specials with Wendi Richter vs. Fabulous Moolah in 1984 and Hulk Hogan vs. Roddy Piper in 1985, they had been spectacular successes. The only regular live wrestling programming on a national basis were PPV shows, and WCW's Clash of the Champions specials.

But the idea of live weekly programming was hardly revolutionary or innovative. While most pro wrestling shows were taped, Memphis Wrestling, which in many ways can be called the predecessor to Raw where the matches themselves were secondary to the soap opera and character development, aired live in its home market for 90 minutes on Saturday mornings for decades. A few years before Raw, Jim Herd, who was running WCW, tried to push the idea of making the Saturday night show live, thinking it would boost ratings. But he couldn't push it through both because of the expense, and also because it would lead to having to cancel the Saturday night house shows. Even though WCW was not profitable on the road, most in the business were still in the mindset that it made its money on house shows, which was correct because at the time the WCW company received no money for television rights. Saturday night was the best night to draw. Also, Herd's experiment of moving the show back an hour, from 7:05 p.m. to 9:05 p.m., with the idea that both hours would be prime time that he came up with ended up as a ratings disappointment, and the show moved back to its long-standing traditional 6:05 p.m. time slot.

In that era, the weekly cable broadcasts of wrestling were the adjunct to the more important shows, which were the syndicated shows. WWE syndicated shows went through various names, with WWE Superstars being the "A" show. That's where the main angles took place, and that's where the localized interviews that sold the arena shows were inserted into each market. The idea is the national cable exposure made wrestlers into stars, but it was the syndicated show, in each market, with the wrestlers talking about their upcoming matches and making references to the local market, that sold the matches, and that was where the money was made.

But within a few years after Raw's debut, the business of syndicating wrestling shows was dying. Wrestling companies paying local stations to air their programming was believed to have dated back to the 1950s and Jim Barnett. When Sam Muchnick headed the NWA, he frowned on the concept, feeling it was a slippery slope that would lead to long-term trouble for the industry.

In that era, Sunday mornings on independent stations were dominated by religious shows, where the church paid for the time and in exchange used the time to promote donations. The feeling was, if the television industry viewed the wrestling show as an early form of what is now called an infomercial, that they would realize how badly the promoters needed them for their business. In most places, the local wrestling show did good ratings, and in many places where wrestling was a big part of the local culture or sports scene, it did amazing ratings.

Everyone's deal was different. In some places, the promoter supplied a tape for free and the station would make money by selling the ad time. In others, the station was also cut in on a percentage of the revenue from the house shows in the city that the show was promoting, which encouraged stations to carry wrestling even if it was hard to get advertisers. Some stations, for whom wrestling was their most popular local show, paid for the production of the show and in some Southern markets, wrestling and the local news were the most profitable programming in the market. In places where that was the case, where the wrestling franchise was valuable locally and multiple stations wanted the show, promoters were able to work out a deal where they were paid a rights fee. But those were the exceptions to the rule, and the money was nothing like television brings today.

What made Raw the most important wrestling television show was a combination of things. The first was actually started by Vince McMahon. In 1983 and 1984, when McMahon expanded his World Wrestling Federation from being the Northeast regional promotion that his father turned into a local institution, to go national, every city of any size had its local form of wrestling. McMahon's goal was to hire the area's biggest stars, add them to his roster of Northeastern stars, complete with Andre the Giant, who had been wrestling's biggest touring attraction for a decade, and then run shows in that area with the stars the fans were used to seeing.

The second part of the plan was to go to the station that broadcasted the local wrestling, and offer money to the station to buy the time slot. McMahon not only would provide a higher caliber of stars and better television production than most (but not all) promotions of that time, but instead of the barter deals, he'd pay the station for the air time. In strong wrestling markets, he was willing to pay upwards of \$2,000 per week.

Immediately, the word in television was what Muchnick feared would happen when Barnett did the same thing in the 50s, that wrestling programming should be treated like religious programming, and the promoters were willing to spend money for it. The prices for air time increased greatly in the 80s, a market like New York was charging \$10,000 per week for air time, which is one of the reasons, along with not being able to compete with the star power provided by both McMahon and Jim Crockett Jr., for their deaths. In reality, key reasons for the deaths of not only Mid South Wrestling, but later Jim Crockett Promotions, and in the 90s, Smoky Mountain Wrestling and ECW, and the money losses by WCW (and for that matter WWF when their house show business started falling in the 90s) were the rising costs of securing television because wrestling, no matter the ratings, was having to compete with infomercials to buy open time slots that were up for sale, and ratings became less important than how much someone was willing to pay for the hour.

Inevitably, the territorial system was going to fail because the public was only going to support at a high level either one or two wrestling brands and whoever had the national cable outlet and produced the strongest product was going to make the local promotion look second rate. Jerry Jarrett was able to keep the Memphis territory afloat until 1997, but in the end, even with the combination of him being paid by the local station instead of the other way around, based on wrestling's long history of ratings in Memphis, and paying talent \$25 per night, eventually the lack of paying spectators to the show led to the profits

dwindling and eventually becoming red ink. Jarrett and co-owner Jerry Lawler were able to sell the territory for \$1 million in cash right before its death, leaving outside investors holding the bag.

Another reason Raw became so popular was the expansion of cable. By the late 90s, more than half the U.S. homes were wired and could get stations like USA, TNT and TBS. And the biggest reason of all was the Monday Night Wars, which led to a boom in interest in pro wrestling.

When Ted Turner went to Eric Bischoff in 1995 and asked him why Vince McMahon's ratings on Monday night were now ahead of their Saturday night ratings, Bischoff told him it was because Monday was a better night and because Raw was sometimes live. Turner then told him that TNT would clear an hour for him every Monday night and he would go live. The feeling in wrestling at the time is that there were a certain number of wrestling fans, and with the shows going head-to-head, it would divide the audience. Instead of a reasonably well rated Raw, which was doing between a 2.5 and 3.0 rating (remember, it was not the primary show at the time; Superstars, usually syndicated in various time slots on the weekends was), you'd have two shows splitting the audience and not doing very well and the result would be a perception wrestling programming wasn't strong. But the opposite happened. Raw was definitely hurt at first by Nitro, but instead of splitting the overall wrestling audience, the audience grew. Raw did well with younger viewers, kids and teenagers. Nitro, through using so many of the stars from the 80s on top, brought back an older fan base that was not watching on Monday nights.

Raw's numbers dropped 15-20% right away, but from the start, the overall audience grew about 60%. It wasn't long before the overall audience doubled and eventually tripled. Raw didn't get back to its old numbers until 1998, but at that point, with wrestling so big on Mondays and Raw delivering the better product, the numbers skyrocketed. In 1995, although Raw had been on the air for three years and WWF had a Monday night presence dating back many years before that, to most people, wrestling was something you watched on Saturdays or Sundays, either morning, afternoon, or evening, depending on the city you lived in. Very quickly, Monday became wrestling night, a tradition that has remained for a generation.

At the peak of the wars in 1998, the differences in the audience were noteworthy. The median age of a Raw viewer ranged between 23 and 25, which means half the viewers were older and half were younger. That was a remarkably low skewing number for a prime time television show. Moreover, as Raw got more risqué and popular, they picked up so many young viewers that even when picking up disgruntled Nitro viewers starting in late 1998, and more in 1999, they got as high as 39% of the audience being 17 or under (right now it's about half that). The ratings for kids and teenagers were among the highest shows, network or otherwise, on television. Nitro's median audience during the peak period was 32, but as time went on and they lost the younger viewers when Raw became the hot show, it's remaining viewers skewed older, hovering closer to 40. Their older audience stuck with it through the bad times while the younger audience either switched to Raw, or many gave up on watching wrestling. That older audience for the most part ceased being fans of wrestling over the last two years of Nitro, and those remaining in 2001 almost all gave up during that year and never came back. The death of WCW immediately cut the over 40 audience watching wrestling down by 35% almost immediately, and that audience never came back.

What is notable is that today, Raw's median audience ranges weekly from 38 to 40 (although this past week, notable because it was a nostalgia show that should have skewed older, it actually skewed younger because of the influx of teenage boys).

The irony is the show is written today to aim younger than the previous boom period, yet the actual audience is significantly older, even than the Nitro audience. Yet, if you go to the live events, kids are more prevalent, meaning that unless you go to a Raw taping or a PPV show, where a lot more people in their 20s and 30s attend, the aim low works to draw smaller crowds and missing out on the largest block of TV viewers. And that isn't the case for any other sport-like activity.

It was Bischoff, not McMahon, who deserves credit, for making Monday night into wrestling night. Before 1995, there was a wrestling show on Monday night, no different than on Saturdays and Sundays. Very quickly after the debut of Nitro, Monday night became wrestling night, which it still is to this day.

Raw was still a standard wrestling television show, with a few exceptions. They did a few things, like the ring card girl, taken from boxing, in the early years and some comedy segments and skits. At one point Michael Hayes used the name Dok Hendrix and they had a band playing between matches. But it was still stars beating non-stars, usually with a competitive main event.

When Bischoff started Nitro, the philosophy was different. Nitro would be based on stars vs. stars. Dream matches of the era, like Hulk Hogan vs. Sting or Hogan vs. Lex Luger, that would be saved for PPV, were instead made Nitro main events because Bischoff was the newcomer whose goal became winning the ratings war. It became an ego thing. The truth was, WWF had historically rarely worried that much about ratings. It was all about house show attendance, PPV purchases and merchandise sales. Television was just the vehicle to drive those revenue streams. If in a certain market, WWF was drawing lower ratings than another promotion, and that wasn't unheard of, it didn't matter because the local promotion was inevitably going to lose ground over time based on losing talent. And bad ratings, which really weren't the case in most places, often didn't affect things since they were paying for the time. And even if they got canceled by stations due to ratings, there was always another station in town ready to take the money.

But WCW made Nitro the focal point of the company, and not the house shows or even the PPV shows. Nitro started beating Raw in the ratings, and eventually, WWF had to respond.

There is a laundry list of reasons why Raw ultimately Nitro, when it started the other way around. Nitro was fresher, brought in new talent and new styles. And they mixed old stars with new stars with the strongest roster any promotion in wrestling history ever had. There was something for everyone. Larger-than-life personas, an all-star cast of the best of WWF stars from its early glory days like Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper and Randy Savage, WCW's stars from years earlier like Sting, Lex Luger and Ric Flair, and a huge key was importing Kevin Nash and Scott Hall from WWF. Underneath, they brought in talent from Japan and Mexico that would tear the house down. WWF was behind the times, with its big guys wrestling a slow style and Vince McMahon's mindset that older people on top wouldn't draw.

But in 1997, WWF switched Raw into where the matches didn't matter, and they had skits, and the landmark U.S. vs. Canada feud, while not initially paying great dividends in ratings, saw house show business pick up. Ironically, what turned WWF's finances around was a business decision on PPV.

McMahon and a few boxing promoters were the only people to have strong success in PPV in the 80s, when people thought it would change sports. McMahon, like the boxing promoters, felt you had to have a special attraction, or PPV wouldn't work. WCW got into the PPV game, but was always behind WWF, until 1994, when they signed Hulk Hogan. McMahon felt Hogan, who was about to turn 39 in 1993 when McMahon wanted him to put over Bret Hart at SummerSlam and make a new champion, was past his prime as the focal point of the company. He wanted to keep him around in a similar role that Bruno Sammartino had for his father after Sammartino gave up the title in 1977. He'd be the legend brought back a few times a year and would always be protected in his role. Hogan had moved on to New Japan Pro Wrestling, which was paying him big money for minimal dates, and filming a television show called "Thunder in Paradise."

While WWE history said Ted Turner's checkbook took Hogan from WWE to WCW, the reality was different. Hogan gave notice to WWE in the summer of 1993, putting over Yokozuna rather than Hart. He was working major shows in Japan when Eric Bischoff, with help from Ric Flair, talked him into coming to WCW, where he started in the summer of 1994.

WCW gave Hogan the chance to be the old Hogan. While he never came close to the popularity he had during his WWF heyday, Hogan had been the guy on top of all the successful WWF PPV shows, and immediately, Hogan's drawing power was such that WCW's PPVs, when Hogan had the right opponent, like Flair, Savage or Vader, would beat WWF's numbers. WCW expanded its number of PPVs and soon was doing one a month. McMahon did the same thing, but felt threatened he'd ruin his big attraction shows like WrestleMania and SummerSlam, so he did secondary shows called "In Your House," two hour for \$14.95. But when WCW continued to have success at \$24.95 going monthly, McMahon followed suit. McMahon's PPV numbers charging \$24.95 increased greatly, both in volume and of course revenue, from when he charged \$14.95, and the company started being profitable.

During the heyday of the Monday Night Wars, about 10 million people would watch wrestling on Monday nights. Keep in mind that at that time there were also only 75 million homes wired for cable, as compared to just under 100 million today. There were weeks in when Raw was on fire that more than 11 million people would watch wrestling on Mondays, and wrestling was so strong that it legitimately hurt the ratings of ABC's Monday Night Football starting with the 1998 season.

As for syndication, because so many people were watching on cable and wrestling was so hot, neither WWF nor WCW needed local syndication, although they did maintain it in many markets. In those days, wrestling would come to town and the demand for tickets got higher and higher. WCW peaked in 1998, although the seeds for the decline, a combination of a complete lack of understanding of what its audience wanted from a wrestling TV show and not making new stars, was already establishing chinks in the foundation. Things would have declined more, as Raw had taken over as the top show due to momentum started with a Steve Austin vs. Mike Tyson angle that saw WrestleMania numbers triple 1997 levels (237,000 buys to 730,000 buys), and led to the landmark Austin vs. McMahon program. But WCW was able to have its best year at the gate and on PPV due to the emergence of Bill Goldberg. After ending Goldberg's winning streak and doing things like the infamous one-finger touch title change (which would have no negative effect today but was a killer back then), and the miscue of making fun of the taped WWF Raw where Mick Foley won the title, and WCW went down hard in 1999 while WWF had the best year in its history.

Raw ratings declined from their peak when adding a second weekly show, Smackdown. Being on network television, Smackdown actually had more viewers than Raw for a time, although it always drew lower ratings than Raw. While Raw's ratings peaked in 1999, attendance and popularity continued to expand through 2000. In late 2000, there were signs that the peak was over, and the fall came after WrestleMania in 2001, based on the heel turn of Austin and a number of other factors. The death of WCW eliminated competition head-to-head, even though WCW had really ceased to be competition in 1999. And the show experienced a slow but steady decline in ratings and PPV, although the emergence of new top headliners like John Cena, Batista and others did lead to attendance at live events increasing from a bottoming out period about seven years ago.

With the exception of Vince McMahon and Executive Producer Kevin Dunn, there have actually been no fixtures through the 19 plus year history of the show. The person who has appeared on the most broadcasts would be Jerry Lawler, who started out doing "The King's Court," an interview segment on the earliest episodes of Raw.

It's been so long that most people remember Lawler as the show's original announcer. In actuality, on the first 13 weeks, the announcers were Vince McMahon, Randy Savage and a comedian named Rob Bartlett. Bartlett was almost an immediate flop in the role, as his comedy didn't fit well into a wrestling show, and on April 26, 1993, he was replaced as the resident comedian by Bobby Heenan. Heenan remained in the position until the end of 1993 when he was dropped by the company, which was losing money, because of his high contract, and went to WCW, where Heenan, Tony Schiavone, Mike Tenay and Larry Zbyszko were the voices of Nitro during its heyday.

Lawler started as a heel interviewer, who was often involved in angles, his biggest being with Bret Hart, one of the top babyfaces of that period. The feud stemmed from Hart winning the King of the Ring PPV in 1993, while Lawler had long been known as the King of Wrestling dating back to Bobby Shane letting him have his gimmick when Shane left the U.S. for Australia in the 70s.

But Lawler has been with the show for most of its 19 years. He was gone for about one year when he was facing sexual charges with a minor in Louisville. WWF fired him when the charges went public, in 1993. The charges were dropped when the girl recanted her story, and Lawler plea bargained down to a minor witness tampering misdemeanor offense. At that point Lawler was brought back to WWF.

Lawler started as an announcer on April 10, 1995, working with McMahon. Randy Savage was actually the first wrestler who was a color commentator on the show, starting in week one and lasting until the Halloween show of 1994, at which point he left to go to WCW. Shawn Michaels and Jim Cornette were in the roles before Lawler, who has been a fixture in that chair with the exception of a few months in 1998 and 1999 when the announcing chair revolved, and a nine month period in 2001 when he quit the company over a decision to fire his wife, Stacy Carter, who had been a female performer. Lawler left out of loyalty, and was replaced by Paul Heyman. Several attempts were made to bring Lawler back, but they all fell through because he insisted on his wife also being hired back. What led to Lawler's return were two things. The first was Lawler had signed a contract with the XWF, a new promotion that the WWF was intent on raiding. The second was Carter left Lawler, so there was no hold up of insisting his wife gets her job back to keep him from finalizing his deal.

Lawler's best remembered partner was Jim Ross. Ross had been the voice of Mid South Wrestling during its heyday, and had personally negotiated the sale of the company to Crockett. He was working with WCW, and a decision was made to take him off the air as the lead announcer, largely a political move because of his affiliation with Bill Watts' failed regime in charge of the company. Ross found a contract loophole and jumped to WWF amid big fanfare, but his love/hate relationship with McMahon started early. Ross was fired after contracting Bell's Palsy with the feeling someone who looked like him couldn't be on television. WCW had no interest in taking him back and his career in wrestling seemed over, as he was limited to being the voice of Smoky Mountain Wrestling, which was more of a favor to Jim Cornette than a job he could make any real money at. Then, out of the blue, he wound up talking his way back in, working with McMahon as a booker, eventually becoming head of talent relations and being put back on the air.

The unique McMahon/Ross relationship can be seen based on the history of Raw announcers. After being fired the first time, McMahon brought Ross back in the summer of 1994, since McMahon was involved in a federal trial on steroid distribution charges (the distribution charges were dropped due to a venue issue and a weak case; McMahon was acquitted of charges that he was in a conspiracy with Pennsylvania doctor George Zahorian to distribute steroids to his wrestlers). After McMahon was acquitted, Ross was fired from the company a second time.

Ross became a regular host on August 5, 1996, working with Lawler and McMahon. McMahon left the booth after the 1997 Survivor Series for a number of reasons, because he had become so unpopular in the wake of screwing Bret Hart that it wouldn't be wise for him to be the lead announcer. This led to transforming into the strongest heel in company history in the feud with Austin. Shortly after the Survivor Series in 1997, the three-man team was Ross, Michael Cole and current ROH announcer Kevin Kelly. Ross suffered another bout with Bell's Palsy in late 1998 but returned after WrestleMania in 1999.

Ross was replaced in 2005 on the move from Spike back to USA. WWE has secretly negotiated a deal with Mike Goldberg, who was the voice of the UFC. On the week that Raw moved from Spike back to USA, Spike countered with a live UFC special. McMahon made a lucrative offer to Goldberg, which would have made him the highest paid announcer WWE ever had, plus a bonus if he would have no-showed the UFC live event and appeared on Raw that night with no

warning. UFC was nowhere near the level of company it would be a year later. However, Goldberg, who was really not a wrestling fan although he did watch the Hulk Hogan AWA era wrestling when living in Minneapolis, got a sizeable raise from UFC to stay. He thought going to WWE could hurt his career in broadcasting real sports, went back-and-forth during the week but eventually changed his mind on the offer. The funny part of the deal is that Goldberg had hoped he would be able to use a stage name as a WWE announcer, thinking it would hurt him long-term when it came to being a sports announcer. McMahon, not knowing any of this, also wanted Goldberg to use a stage name, because at the time, McMahon was still bitter about Bill Goldberg. Goldberg's pulling out led to Ross getting a few more weeks before he was replaced by current ESPN anchor Jonathan Coachman. Ross also suffered serious health issues during that period. Coachman was later phased out in favor of former ECW announcer Joey Styles, and after Ross was brought back for the 2006 WrestleMania, a month later he replaced Styles in his final run as lead announcer. He was moved to Smackdown in the 2008 draft. Aside from a few month run in 2011 as part of a storyline to get HHH over as a babyface and then being fired to get John Laurinaitis over as a heel, he's done spot duty on rare occasions, usually for a match or two, like this past week, on nostalgia based shows.

Raw started as a one hour show. Since leaving Allentown and Hamburg with the national expansion, WWF had been taping its television in major arenas. They would tape a few shows on one night, with the first hour airing live and the remaining hours airing in successive weeks. They taped in cycles, where they would do several week long storylines starting with the live show and building to climax on the final show of the taping. Because of climaxing the storylines on the show the week before the next live taping, it was the taped shows that usually drew the highest ratings.

The impression was always given that the show was live, even though much of the time that wasn't the case. Where the show differed from the syndicated shows was there was more comedy involved, and the syndicated format was squash matches. Raw had squash matches at first, but most shows also had a main event, and built storylines week-to-week for television, which had been done in syndication, but not as frequently.

Ratings immediately increased from what Prime Time Wrestling was doing. During the pre-Nitro period would range from the high 2s to the mid-3s. But in its early years, seeing Raw live was not a hot ticket. It didn't take long before, even with papering, they couldn't come close to filling the Manhattan Center for tapings, and started at first going on the road to small Northeast arenas, looking for places that had capacities of 3,000 or so. That's why, even to this day, the city that has hosted the second most episodes of Raw is Poughkeepsie, NY, a city Raw outgrew 14 years ago.

The greatest thing, in hindsight, that happened to the show was the Monday Night Wars. WCW debuted Nitro in September, 1995, and one-hour versions of each show went head-to-head, with the ratings lead going back-and-forth. Nitro went live every week. During the first several months, the ratings went back-and-forth. Raw had the edge, in the sense that Nitro had to deliver significantly stronger main events with bigger names to win the week.

In 1996, the ante was upped. Nitro went to two hours, and with the NWO angle, beat Raw every week, and by 1997, usually by a large margin. Raw went to two hours in February, 1997, and creatively started taking off a few months later. Many will remember 1997 as the year Raw really broke out, with the Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart feud where Austin was the babyface in the U.S. and Hart was the babyface in Canada. It lost the ratings every week, usually by a wide margin. With WWF losing millions, McMahon made the move to get rid of Hart, his highest paid wrestler (McMahon had signed Hart to an unheard of 20-year contract in 1996 to keep Hart from signing a three-year deal at \$2.8 million per year with WCW—the type of money only Hulk Hogan made in those days. But the company was losing money and McMahon attempted to get Hart to agree to defer his contract payments, and when Hart turned that down, McMahon gave him the option to leave and see if WCW was still interested in giving him the

deal. That led to the 1997 Survivor Series, and the birth of the heel Mr. McMahon character.

The relationship lasted five years, during which ratings fell significantly. While WCW had its best year ever in 1998, the WWF business turned around that year. There were a number of reasons, the biggest being the ascension of Austin. Austin really started showing signs of being a major drawing card in late 1997, as there was a late year rise in business after he returned from a major neck injury which threatened to end his career, and eventually did shorten his career. But the interplay with McMahon and the rise of The Rock and DX led to the golden era of the promotion, which lasted through WrestleMania of 2001, and ended when Austin was turned heel.

In 1998, Raw was still only going live every other week. When business was booming in September 1999, they made the call to be a live weekly show, a status that has remained unchanged. A year later, the show became a major money generator, as a contract signed with TNN, The National Network (which is now Spike TV), increased the annual rights fee for Raw from \$5.5 million that USA was paying to \$28 million, plus WWF also controlled a percentage of the ad revenue for the show. Raw, the highest rated show on cable television, was by itself strong enough to make TNN from an also-ran network with an 0.7 prime time ratings average into a borderline top ten network.

The relationship lasted five years, a period where ratings fell consistently. A combination of the frustration of blaming being on a weaker network and Bonnie Hammer getting control of USA Network and wanting wrestling back led to the 2005 move back. As it turned out, it was the show, not the network, since ratings continued to fall with the move back. Plus, when Spike saw the handwriting on the wall in 2005, they announced they were canceling Raw, something of a face saving move. But with no leverage, WWF got a worse deal from USA to move than they were getting from Spike, getting the same \$28 million per year licensing fee, but WWF with its new deal no longer shared in the ad revenue.

Still, Raw is a solid consistent performer. While it is no longer the highest rated show on cable, it still runs first run episodes 52 weeks a year, something no other highly rated show does. The scripted high rated dramas and reality shows on cable run short seasons. Sports are also seasonal.

The company got a lot of publicity this week over hitting the 1,000-episode milestone. Always comparing itself to scripted prime time shows, whether they be "Gunsmoke" or "The Simpsons" or other shows that remained ratings hits for decades, the reality is that sports programming, unlike scripted shows, can last forever. The NFL and MLB have been consistently on national television since the 50s and nobody really calls any attention to milestones. Similarly, pro wrestling has been successful on U.S. television since Gorgeous George popularized the medium in the late 1940s.

Running 19 ½ years, Raw would be among the longer lasting wrestling shows in history, but far from the longest.

The problem with saying that, is where Raw really stands is more based on how you choose to categorize things.

Almost every city of any size has consistently had pro wrestling on television since the advent of independent stations in the late 50s or early 60s, until the deaths of the territories, mostly in the late 80s. In many cases, the promotions and stations changed. However, Raw also changed stations during its run, but kept its name and never went off the air.

Verne Gagne's AWA All-Star Wrestling show started with him as promoter in 1960, and lasted 30 years until the promotion closed, in the home Minneapolis market. Similarly, Championship Wrestling from Florida was in every major city in the state from 1961 until the promotion closed in 1987.

One of the most popular and highly-rated wrestling shows was the St. Louis based Wrestling at the Chase, which debuted on May 23, 1959. The show got its name because it was originally taped at the ritzy Chase Hotel, with the shows in the early years featuring performers like Dick the Bruiser and Gene Kiniski brawling at the Khorrasan Room, while an older upper class skewing audience, men in suits and ties, and women in evening gowns, hosted by Joe Garagiola, looked more like a crowd at an opera than a sporting event.

In the seal of approval, the site of the NXT show is in . The St. Louis Wrestling Club was owned about 51% by Sam Muchnick, until January 1, 1982, when he retired and sold his interest to Bob Geigel, Harley Race, Pat O'Connor and Verne Gagne, who within two years drove ratings so far down the station had decided not to cancel the show, but have a new promotion in the time slot.

The choice came down to local promoter Larry Matysik, known locally as the voice of wrestling and Muchnick's longtime assistant, who had quit the promotion in early 1983 and started running on his own, and Vince McMahon, who at the time had not yet let the world know he was planning on going national. McMahon was running in the Northeast, but had also started running shows in Los Angeles and San Jose, markets that opened up when Mike LeBell shut down his promotion.

The name was such an institution locally that when McMahon struck a deal to get the time slot, by offering KPLR-TV, \$2,100 per week (previously KPLR had paid for production of the local show in exchange for a percentage of house show revenue, and the WWF deal included 5% of all local house shows), he called the WWF syndicated show, "Wrestling at the Chase" instead of "Superstars," in the market, at least through the end of 1986, if not longer. Wrestling remained on the station until the early 90s, when they finally canceled WWF wrestling due to poor ratings. So did the show last 24 ½ years, 26 ½ years, or 34 years? During that period, the show had several time slot changes, but may have been the longest running show on the same station in pro wrestling history.

Similarly, 25-year-old Lance Russell began announcing pro wrestling in Memphis in 1951 on local television. He remained a fixture on the air in that city for nearly 40 years, until signing with WCW in early 1989. And after his WCW deal expired in 1992, he returned to host Memphis Wrestling until a falling out with the promotion in 1997. During that period, the show bounced around different stations. It was on Ch. 13 in Memphis as far back as anyone could remember. In 1977, when Jerry Jarrett opened up opposition to Nick Gulas, he brought Russell with him and they moved wrestling to Ch. 5, where the studio wrestling show remained until Jarrett sold the promotion, and eventually went out of business. So, as far as Championship Wrestling, the name of the television show was concerned, is that 46 years or just the 20-year Jarrett run and the 26-year Nick Gulas promotion run? In this case, I'd argue the latter because they were two different promotions.

Vince McMahon Sr. was taping regular wrestling shows from the mid-50s until he sold the promotion to his son in 1982. There were various wrestling television shows on in Los Angeles from 1947 to 1975, although with different names, different time slots and on different stations.

Generally, the three shows that are talked about as the longest running wrestling shows in history, whether this is accurate or not, would be Houston Wrestling, Portland Wrestling and Georgia/World Championship Wrestling/WCW Saturday Night.

Raw may be able to claim to be the longest running national weekly episodic television show in U.S. history if it wasn't for wrestling on TBS.

Beginning under the name Georgia Championship Wrestling, later being renamed World Championship Wrestling and then WCW Saturday Night, the Saturday 6-8 p.m. Eastern time block on TBS is listed as one of the longest running national television shows in U.S. history. But there are two questions regarding how long this would be.

For one, what was the starting point? WTCG, Ch. 17 in Atlanta, owned by Ted Turner, became the first national SuperStation in January 1976. Georgia Championship Wrestling was the first, hit on the station, and its highest rated show for the next several years as more and more cable companies picked the channel up. At its peak, in 1981, the show averaged a 6.4 rating on Saturday and a 6.6 on Sunday (ironically Saturday was the first-run show and Sunday was highlights of usually the previous week plus tapes of wrestlers headed to Georgia from other territories), and for years was the highest rated show on cable television.

The channel later changed its call letters to WTBS, and later was just known as the TBS SuperStation.

I couldn't even tell you when Georgia Championship Wrestling started. It was on WQXI-TV in Atlanta for years, likely from the late 50s or early 60s under promoter Paul Jones. Ray Gunkel, who was running the promotion, struck a deal in late 1971 to move the show to Turner's WTCG, where it debuted on December 25, 1971. The show remained on the channel until June 24, 2000, through several ownership changes, when it ran its final Saturday night broadcast.

The promotion changed its name first in 1972 after Gunkel died, when the other partners on ABC Promotions tried to shut his widow out of the company which led to a major wrestling war. Without missing a beat, the new company was named Georgia Championship Wrestling, Inc.

What was notable about that show is in November, 1972, almost the entire roster of Georgia Championship Wrestling, with the exception of Bob Armstrong and Darrell Cochran, quit the promotion. In a major story on Thanksgiving morning, just hours before GCW's biggest show of the year, it was announced almost the entire roster was going with Ann Gunkel, Ray's widow, for her new promotion, All South Wrestling.

A consortium of NWA promoters moved in, spearheaded by Eddie Graham, and sent talent that night into Atlanta so they could run a show. They put Bill Watts in charge of booking and rebuilt the promotion with Florida stars like Jack Brisco, Buddy Colt as well as the return of Tim "Mr. Wrestling" Woods, who was the area's most popular wrestler a few years earlier when he quit over feeling cheated on a payoff when he larger than usual house for his challenge to NWA champion Gene Kiniski. As it turned out, the biggest enduring star was journeyman wrestler John Walker, in his early 40s and looking older, whose career appeared to be almost finished. He donned the mask and became Mr. Wrestling II, and had a second career, far more successful than his first.

What was unique about the war from late 1972 into 1974, is that GCW had its television deal with Turner's station. But Ann Gunkel, who had a close relationship with Turner, was also able to get her show on the station.

The Atlanta promotional war was among the most bitter and dirtiest in history. But every Saturday morning, almost like the practice sessions between rival teams on The Ultimate Fighter, one group of wrestlers would finish their show, clean up and the other promotion would come in the doors ready to film their show. Not only that, but the two shows aired one after the other, from 6-8 p.m. When Gunkel's promotion folded in 1974, both hours went to Georgia Championship Wrestling and were produced as two different shows. That explains why, for years, Gordon Solie would sign off at 7:04 p.m., the show would end, the opening theme music would play again, and Solie would welcome people to a show that had already been on for an hour. And frequently, wrestlers who worked the first hour would wrestle on the second hour, as they were treated as if they were completely different shows.

Jim Barnett was brought in to run the company in 1973 partially because he knew and was willing to do any dirty tactic known to mankind to destroy Gunkel. Barnett ran the company until he was forced out by Ole Anderson in 1982.

In 1984, the majority of stockholders, behind Anderson's back, in one of wrestling's best-kept secrets, sold the company to Vince McMahon. After a court case where they ruled that McMahon had legally purchased the company, Georgia Championship Wrestling folded. The TV show, which had already had a name change to World Championship Wrestling, continued in a new format, which was WWF tapes being sent in. A year later, when Turner was going to cancel the show due to declining ratings and being upset McMahon wasn't taping the show in Atlanta at his studios, McMahon sold the time slot to Jim Crockett for \$1 million. Crockett ran from 1985 to 1988 on the station, and then, deeply in debt, sold the company to Turner Broadcasting. But the show ran in the Saturday night time slot on the station for 28 ½ years, of which 24 ½ of those years it was a national show. Going weekly for 28 ½ years would be about 1,480 episodes on the same station. On a national basis, the show did about 1,275 episodes.

Raw will not be what it always claims to be, the longest running weekly episodic national television show in history until November 2017. But if you take the term literally, since they never use the term national, it will not even be the longest running pro wrestling show on television until 2032 at the earliest.

But Raw's 1,000 number includes five years on TNN, so if you include the WQXI years, since the show was called Georgia Championship Wrestling, it's closer to 40 years and more than 2,000 episodes. The show died several months before WCW shut down, since they already had Thunder on Thursdays on TBS to go along with Nitro, the Saturday night show had, from 1995 on with the rise of Nitro, become an afterthought. Ratings dwindled, falling as low as a 1.3, since the big names almost never appeared on the show, and there was really no reason to continue it.

Promoter Don Owen debuted on television in Portland, OR, on July 10, 1953, with a show called Heidelberg Wrestling, on KPTV, named after its sponsor, the Heidelberg Brewing Company. In 1955, the same show switched stations to KOIN, and changed its name to Portland Wrestling. It returned to KPTV in 1967, using the name Portland Wrestling, until being canceled at the end of 1991, when WWF struck a deal with the station. Like in St. Louis, instead of paying for production of a weekly show, KPTV was able to get a tape of wrestling sent in, and get paid for the time. Don Owen's leading sponsor, a local furniture and appliance dealer, declaring bankruptcy also led to the show's demise at that time, but the truth is, even if Tom Peterson hadn't had financial issues, the economics of wrestling for a local television station and do run a regional promotion had changed. It was only a question of when, as the show's death at that time was an inevitability.

But it ran 38 ½ years uninterrupted on Saturday nights, roughly 2,000 episodes. For much of that period, the show ran live matches in prime time from the 3,000-seat converted bowling alley that Owen owned and renamed the Portland Sports Arena. In the late 70s, the show moved to 11:30 p.m., airing on a few hour tape delay.

The longest running pro wrestling show in U.S. history when it comes to a show for the entire time being run by the same promotion was likely Houston Wrestling, promoted by the Gulf Athletic Club. The show went on the air just as television was starting in the city in 1948, under the name Texas Rasslin. In its first ten or so years, the show not only ran on the station, but was syndicated all over the country. Texas became known for a bloody brawling style of wrestling, which also featured a heavy dose of Lucha Libre, since Hispanic stars like Rito Romero (who popularized the upside down surfboard, known as the Rito Romero special), Blackie Guzman, Pepper Gomez and later Jose Lothario were the show's flagship stars. It was never as national as the Chicago or Los Angeles wrestling shows in the early 50s that were on network stations, but it was in a lot of markets at least through the late 50s.

Houston Wrestling started on KLEE (later KPRC), before switching to KHTV in 1967. The show remained on the air through the summer of 1987, a 39-year-run. Paul Boesch, who hosted the show through its entire run, had a "39 on 39" slogan during the last year. Boesch, who had been a wrestling star in the 30s and 40s, suffered injuries that cut down his wrestling and he became a booker and television announcer,

and top assistant to promoter Morris Sigel. He took over as promoter in 1966. Houston Wrestling for most of its run would air 90 minutes of action on Saturday nights from the Friday night house show each week at the Sam Houston Coliseum. In the 80s, when Boesch sold a percentage of the office to Bill Watts and became affiliated with Mid South Wrestling, the TV consisted of the 60 minute Mid South show with localized promos Boesch would do at the arenas and one or two matches from the local house shows to fill the other half hour. The block became two hours in 1985.

The death of that show came over a series of situations. In 1987, with business in Houston being at its weakest point in anyone's memory, tensions between Watts and Boesch had heightened. Watts sold his promotion to Jim Crockett Jr., and Boesch was not even informed of it until the deal was finalized. Miffed that Crockett Jr. didn't call him personally, which he should have, Boesch instead made a deal to affiliate with Vince McMahon. But once he made the deal, it went downhill fast. The two men had entirely different philosophies on what pro wrestling was, made worse by the fact there were so many no-shows on the WWF shows in Houston. Boesch came from the school where you don't false advertise and there was nothing worse than no-shows. He wanted out, and announced his retirement and promoted his final show in August 1987. Ironically, the very weekend of his retirement, he spoke to the station about eventually trying to get something going. It wasn't long after his retirement that Boesch struck a deal with Crockett, but he refused to allow himself to be called the promoter in Houston because if would have broken his word about retiring. He passed away in 1989 at the age of 76.

BIGGEST MOMENTS IN RAW HISTORY (PART ONE, 1993-1999)

May 17, 1993: In a taping at the Manhattan Center, there were actually two of the biggest moments of the early history of Raw. Marty Jannetty, who had been fired from the promotion months earlier after showing up passed out at the Royal Rumble in January, returned out of nowhere and won the Intercontinental title from Shawn Michaels in what was the first truly great match on the show.

The same night saw the angle that put the 1-2-3 Kid (Sean Waltman) on the map when he pinned Razor Ramon (Scott Hall). Waltman, known as The Lightning Kid, was actually a pushed star on the Global Wrestling Federation television show where he had that company's best matches against Jerry Lynn, who he broke in with. He was brought to WWF in the role of a jobber who got no offense, given a different name each week. He got little offense on Ramon before hitting a moonsault block and getting the three count. While the job guy scoring an upset over an established heel was a gimmick that went back decades, it was not something that was part of the WWF's playbook. The angle has been copied a million times, but none of them are remembered as well.

November 20, 1995: In one of the biggest angles of its time, Michaels was wrestling Owen Hart on a live Raw and collapsed in the ring. The show portrayed it as if Michaels was close to death as he didn't move, playing on the fact Michaels had taken a savage beating from some marines outside a night club in Syracuse, NY a few months earlier which forced him to vacate the IC title. Fans were told that Michaels had suffered brain injuries that would end his career, but of course, like all good babyfaces, he came back, in this case, several weeks later. When he did, for the first time in his career he was a genuine drawing card, which built to his winning the WWF title from Bret Hart at the subsequent WrestleMania in Anaheim. The company had gone through several straight years of poor attendance, but the Michaels comeback and Hart's WWF title win over Kevin Nash, which took place the night before, saw business immediately pick up substantially and the worst drawing period in company history was over.

March 31, 1997: Bret Hart, who had been the company's top babyface since his return from a hiatus in the fall of 1996, had turned heel at WrestleMania a week earlier in an I Quit match with Steve Austin, where Austin turned face. Hart then did an interview, where he turned on the American wrestling fans, while saying he still respected the Canadian and European fans. At that point Hart asked his family members, brother Owen, who he had feuded with for years, and Davey

Boy Smith, who he had also feuded with, to join him in forming a new Hart Foundation. This led to the U.S. vs. Canada feud, with Bret and Austin as the focal points, where the babyfaces changed each week depending upon what city Raw was coming from. The feud was the beginning of a turnaround of a stagnant product.

August 11, 1997: While the Hart Foundation vs. Steve Austin remained the top feud, Shawn Michaels had turned heel on Undertaker and joined up with Hunter Hearst Helmsley, and his bodyguard, the jacked up female Chyna, to form Degeneration X. Complete with an innovative entrance video, DX quickly became the hottest heel act in years, to the point that at the end of the year, on two straight nights, fans became so unruly at shows that they had to stop the shows before a main event took place because fans hated Michaels that much.

Eventually the group, which later brought in two undercard acts going nowhere who started hitting it big with a sing-along ring entrance, The New Age Outlaws (taken from the late 60s and early 70s Outlaws tag team of Dick Murdoch & Dusty Rhodes) of Road Dogg Jesse James & Bad Ass Billy Gunn joined the group, as did Sean Waltman, as X-Pac.

January 19, 1998: If you had to pick one moment where the momentum in the Monday Night Wars switched, it was, with a ring filled with people and complete chaos, when Steve Austin and Mike Tyson had a pull-apart brawl. Austin, whose career had nearly ended a few months earlier from an Owen Hart tombstone piledriver, had, while on the shelf, remained on the show doing skits to hide that he couldn't wrestle. But when he returned, attendance picked up big and he was clearly the company's biggest drawing card. Austin was a star to wrestling fans, but a complete unknown outside of wrestling. But with that angle, which got coverage all over the world due to Tyson, Austin became the hottest star in wrestling. Before long, Austin was for the next three plus years, a bigger star, when it came to ticket selling and merchandise moving, of any wrestler past, present or future, in history.

April 13, 1998: Even with Austin on fire, and WrestleMania in 1998 doing more buys than any PPV had done since Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage nine years earlier, Raw was still losing every week to Nitro. The gap had started closing, but the show that put it over the top was a two-hour build to a match with Austin vs. Vince McMahon. There were segments building to McMahon finally wrestling, with Pat Patterson and Jerry Brisco giving him wrestling tips. The match actually never happened, as Mick Foley as Dude Love saved McMahon, which led to an Austin vs. Dude Love PPV program. Raw beat Nitro for the first time in the ratings since May, 1996. While ratings went back-and-forth until January, 1999, it was clear the momentum was with WWF, and it started the mental destruction of Eric Bischoff and the entire WCW company, even though they were making more money than ever before, they couldn't mentally handle losing Monday night ratings and hotshot themselves into oblivion.

July 27, 1998: Perhaps the most shocking moment in the history of Raw was one of the few times they went into the ring without a script. During the height of the Monday Night Wars, everything under the sun was tried, including doing actual legitimate matches, the "Brawl for All" concept. The idea was to do a tournament and not script it, with the idea of creating a tough guy superstar in Steve "Dr. Death" Williams, to set up a program against Steve Austin. To say this concept backfired would be an understatement. A number of wrestlers, including Williams, Savio Vega, Mark Canterbury, Charles Wright and others ended up getting significant injuries. Many wrestlers tough-guy images took a tumble, and even the eventual winner, Bart Gunn, was no longer with the company the next year and whatever he got out of winning was a job with All Japan Pro Wrestling for a few years and a brief career in MMA, which had a limited upside given that he was past the age of 40 when he started. Williams had a reputation as a bar fighter, for his ability to knock people out with one punch from his college days and early career in Mid South Wrestling. He was also a four-time All-American heavyweight wrestler at the University of Oklahoma during perhaps the deepest period of talent ever in the U.S. collegiate heavyweight division. But Williams at this point was 38, hadn't trained for fighting and his last competitive wrestling match was 16 years earlier. Brawl for All was not MMA, although the idea was taken from MMA and the original choice for referee was John

McCarthy (he turned it down, although Danny Hodge was used as the commissioner). It was boxing with oversized gloves, with takedowns legal and worth points, but no ground work. It was somebody's idea of taking the punching of MMA, eliminating all kicks and submissions, with the idea of no ground work because the wrestling fans may find it boring. The segments were hit-and-miss, as some wrestling crowds hated them, and others liked them. Some matches did not do well in the ratings, but others, like this one, did. In fact, the Williams vs. Gunn match, featuring two guys who normally wouldn't figure to be over, gained nearly 1 million viewers and was the difference maker in Raw beating Nitro that night. Most remember Gunn knocking Williams out, but the back story made it more interesting. Each had won their first round match in the tournament. Dan Severn, who also won his first round match, was asked to pull out because of the fear he might be the one guy who could beat Williams. Williams had beaten Severn when both were in college, and Severn was 40, but had remained active and competing the entire time. Williams' body had taken a beating from 16 years of physically tough pro wrestling, working the hard style of Mid South Wrestling and the even harder style of All Japan Pro Wrestling. Williams also had developed a number of drug issues associated with both the pain and partying that were part of being a superstar in Japan, and was clearly past his prime when he came over. Before the match, Gunn told someone in WWF, most stories have it being Jim Ross, although others have said it was really Bruce Prichard (I've heard both, Ross certainly makes for a better story), asking if he would get heat for knocking out Williams, since everyone knew Williams was supposed to win. Gunn had won Tough Man contests when he was younger, so had more experience with actual boxing than Williams, who had no boxing training. Throwing punches at guys in bars who don't know how to fight, and moving in the ring with oversized gloves is something completely different. Still, Williams was winning the fight on points when Gunn surprised Williams with a takedown, and in doing so, Williams completely tore his hamstring. He knew he was done, and had no business coming out for the third round, even though he was ahead, and no ability to move, starting taking a series of punches from Gunn, and was eventually knocked out.

January 4, 1999: What made this show so famous was not anything on Raw, although Mick Foley as Mankind, beating The Rock to win the WWF title was certainly a big deal. It was the words of Tony Schiavone, on Nitro, under orders by Bischoff, to say that Mankind, Mick Foley, who used to wrestle here, will be winning their world title on a taped show, and mocked the decision to make Foley champion, saying, "That'll put asses in seats." While Foley had established himself as a main eventer, and his Hell in a Cell match with Undertaker in 1998 was one of the most talked about matches of the decade and maybe in history, he was not the kind of person that anyone would have expected to be world champion. In many ways, Foley's title win was the first time McMahon made the title an award for loyal service as opposed to it being for the top face or top heel in the company, since clearly those positions were held by Austin and The Rock. At the time of the announcement, roughly 375,000 homes and a total of 600,000 viewers at that moment switched from Nitro to Raw, making it one of the biggest promotional blunders of all-time. Little known is that on that night, Bischoff was asking around whether or not he should announce it on the show, and the consensus was strong that it would be a big mistake. Bischoff usually listened, but this time he didn't. To understand how big pro wrestling was on that night, Raw set its all-time record rating up to that point, a 5.76, while Nitro did a 4.96. While Mankind beat Rock for the title, WCW did the infamous Hulk Hogan one-finger to the chest title change to Kevin Nash, who had just ended Bill Goldberg's winning streak. While the big switch of audiences to see Foley win the title is much remembered, what is forgotten is that after Foley won the title, a Goldberg run-in on Nitro and Austin run-in on Raw were going on at the same time for the overrun. Goldberg saw Nitro bring its audience back, going from a 4.6 to a 6.5, taking many of those viewers back from Raw which went from a 5.9 to a 5.1. The growth of the final segment of Nitro, many returning after Foley had won the title, was an incredible 2.1 million viewers, among the biggest growth periods in history. Between the two shows on that night during the overrun, there were 8,642,000 homes and 13,827,000 different viewers watching wrestling. And keep in mind two other factors. There were only 74.5 million homes with cable on that night, compared with more than 99 million today. And going head-to-head with wrestling that night was the Fiesta Bowl game that determined college football's national championship, which had nearly 30 million viewers.

May 10, 1999: During the height of the Monday Night Wars, with Nitro pre-empted due to the NBA playoffs and Raw having the night to themselves, the show drew a 8.09 rating and 9.2 million viewers, destroying the 1.4 that the NBA playoff game did the same night. The show peaked with a main event of The Rock & Steve Austin & Vince McMahon vs. The Undertaker & HHH & Shane McMahon, which did a 9.17 quarter and 10.4 million viewers.

June 28, 1999: A match where Steve Austin won the WWF title from The Undertaker in Charlotte drew the largest rating and audience to ever witness a pro wrestling match or for that matter, any pro wrestling segment, ever on U.S. cable television. The match did a 9.5 rating, which was 10.72 million viewers. Perhaps the most impressive is that one out of every six television sets in the U.S. that had cable that was on during that time was watching that match. Because for more than a decade, Vince Russo has made it a talking point to say how the "The Is Your Life: Rock," segment was the highest rated segment in history (it did an 8.4 quarter), to show how skits outdraw matches, it's become a talking point how that was the highest rated segment in Raw history. Actually there were a handful of different quarter hours that beat that total, including most of the second hour of the May 10, 1999 show.

MOST MATCHES ON RAW

Source: *TheScore.com*

HHH: 374

Chris Jericho: 360

Kane: 347

John Cena: 299

Randy Orton: 290

Edge: 277

Big Show: 246

Jeff Hardy: 238

Christian: 227

Shawn Michaels: 221

The Rock: 200

Billy Gunn: 178

X-Pac: 176

Matt Hardy: 175

Bradshaw/JBL: 171

Bubba Ray Dudley: 164

The Miz: 162

Trish Stratus: 160

Test: 160

Undertaker: 159

RAW RATINGS HISTORY (average household rating)

1993-August 1995 numbers unavailable

MONDAY NIGHT WARS ERA

1995 (September through December): 2.38

1996: 2.65

1997 : 2.72

1998: 4.42

1999: 6.07

2000: 5.90

2001: 4.66

2002: 4.14

2003: 3.77

2004: 3.68

2005: 3.82

2006: 3.88

2007: 3.65

2008: 3.28

2009: 3.56

2010: 3.20

CITIES THAT HAVE HOSTED THE MOST EPISODES OF RAW

New York: 40

Poughkeepsie: 25

Philadelphia: 19

Chicago: 18

Boston: 17

Cleveland: 17

Atlanta: 16

Richmond: 16

Anaheim: 15

MOST WINS ON RAW

(Thanks to Emerson Whitner)

HHH: 192

Chris Jericho: 166

John Cena: 166

Kane: 163

Randy Orton: 145

Shawn Michaels: 140

Edge: 129

Big Show: 125

Jeff Hardy: 124

The Rock: 107

Billy Gunn: 101

Undertaker: 92

Rob Van Dam: 92

X-Pac: 90

Christian: 87

Trish Stratus: 81

Chris Benoit: 81

Booker T: 77

Kofi Kingston: 75

John Bradshaw Layfield: 74

Batista: 73

Bubba Ray Dudley: 73

Mickie James: 73

Test: 72

Matt Hardy: 72

MOST VARIETY OF GIMMICK MATCHES

Three-way match: 78

Battle Royal: 64

Cage match: 49

Four-way: 31

Lumberjack match: 26

Tables match: 25

Falls count anywhere: 20

In what was the biggest episode of Raw in years, the 1,000th edition of the show seemed to build angles for both next year's Royal Rumble and WrestleMania, as well as featured the planned big summer angle, the heel turn of C.M. Punk.

The Rock made the first of his two appearances on the show during a segment involving Punk and Daniel Bryan. During the segment, Rock said that he would be challenging for the WWE title at the Royal Rumble on 1/27 in Phoenix. Later in the show, they had a face-to-face with Rock and John Cena.

The idea of Rock vs. Cena being for the title was at first broached for last year's WrestleMania and openly talked about in interviews. The idea was that if it was going to be the biggest match in pro wrestling history, as it was billed, then it should be for the championship. However, the decision was made to not go in that direction. After WrestleMania, Rock did an interview teasing that he was looking to win the title one more time.

With Punk turning heel at the end of the show, by both failing to help Cena while Big Show was giving him a beating, and then Punk coming out of nowhere to give Rock a flying clothesline when Rock was about to drop the people's elbow on Show, the show ended with Rock vs. Punk as the match people would most want to see, shot in an angle that was viewed by more people than has viewed any segment of Raw of late.

Logic would indicate Rock beating Punk for the title, and then losing it to the perpetually screwed Cena at WrestleMania in New York. Of course, with the New York audience, there is the potential for the same dynamic at Mania where the 90% or more of the crowd is against Cena, but they've got months to have Cena continually save fair maidens in distress. Cena has been a stronger babyface since Mania, working with Brock Lesnar and John Laurinaitis, but with Rock, things may revert back. WWE also doesn't like to make things too predictable, but there's no point in having Rock get laid out by Punk if he's not Rock's next opponent.

The show also teased a celebrity angle with Daniel Bryan and Charlie Sheen for SummerSlam on 8/19. The angle started when Bryan was left at the altar by A.J., who took the job as Raw General Manager instead of marrying Bryan (no, there was no explanation about making sense of one having anything to do with the other). Sheen, who did three interviews on Skype during the broadcast since he shut down his Twitter account and was under contract to WWE for the show, made fun of Bryan, calling him an Oompa Loompa. Bryan later, in an interview with Sean Mooney (in for one shot), said he'd love to put Sheen in the Yes lock. Sheen, in his final appearance, brought up how he isn't hard to find and for Bryan to come and get him the next time he's in Los Angeles, which is the site of SummerSlam. So they are doing something there. Sheen was wearing a hat plugging his show, "Anger Management," but it'll be interesting how much he agrees to do and how much they are paying him. He's really the biggest name current real-life non-wrestling celebrity they've used as a PPV drawing card probably since Donald Trump.

The HHH vs. Lesnar main event was made official during an angle on the show that included Paul Heyman and Stephanie McMahon. Cena vs. Punk or Cena vs. Punk vs. Show would seem to make sense for SummerSlam coming off the show. If Cena is facing Rock, that would

put Undertaker in the favorite position to wrestle Lesnar at Mania. The No. 1 contenders match on the 7/24 Smackdown tapings in Kansas City would indicate yet another Sheamus vs. Alberto Del Rio match.

The 1,000th Raw on 7/23 in St. Louis at the Scottrade Center was promoted around a Punk vs. Cena title match where Cena would cash in his Money in the bank briefcase. Cena became the first winner in history to fail to take the title, winning via DQ when he had Punk in the STF when Show interfered. This led to Punk not helping Cena and Rock making the save and Punk taking him out. The other key segments were the wedding that was never finalized, the Lesnar-HHH confrontation, Shawn Michaels & HHH reuniting DX (which ended up including Road Dogg, Billy Gunn and Sean Waltman) and Rock's return was advertised. Undertaker was the only "surprise" return. Names like Bret Hart and Mick Foley were not kept secret, but not pushed hard either.

A lot of other wrestlers were contacted at one point, but ended up not being scripted into the show. Foley was there as Dude Love, dancing with Brodus Clay. Jim Ross announced an early trios match and was not humiliated in any fashion. There were suggestions, I think even made by Punk, for him to announce his match and his angle, which didn't happen. Slick (Ken Johnson) returned as the minister presiding over the wedding. Bret Hart and Howard Finkel each ring announced one match. Jim Duggan had a cameo backstage walking around like only Duggan with a 2x4. Mae Young, now 89, had a cameo with a guy wearing a costume like a hand, supposedly being the grown up version of the hand she gave birth to in one of the dumber but most remembered segments on Raw. Sean Mooney, who worked for the company as an announcer from 1988-1993, did one backstage interview. Gene Okerlund did a backstage cameo. Trish Stratus did a backstage cameo with HHH as a spoof on an angle done when Stratus was breaking in as a wrestler, and HHH was teaching her wrestling moves and Stephanie walked in as it appeared HHH was behind her. This time Stratus was teaching HHH yoga and behind him when the rest of DX walking in with the two really not in all that comprising a position. Stephanie McMahon and Paul Heyman were part of the Lesnar-HHH angle. Lita, John Bradshaw Layfield, Ron Simmons (reprising their role as the APA), Sgt. Slaughter, Rikishi, Sid Vicious, Roddy Piper, Bob Backlund, Vader, Road Warrior Animal, Diamond Dallas Page and Doink the Clown did a legends segment involving Heath Slater segment. The only legend from the previous weeks legends segments not brought back was Wendi Richter.

Undertaker was brought in as a surprise, in a segment where Kane was surrounded by Jinder Mahal, Curt Hawkins, Tyler Reks, Hunico, Camacho and Drew McIntyre. Undertaker came out with a slow ring entrance. Undertaker looked like he had aged greatly since his Mania match. Also, in standing face-to-face with Kane, it was clear he had lost some height, which likely indicates back problems since Kane was taller than he was. The two cleaned house together, with Kane choke slamming Hawkins and Undertaker choke slamming Hunico, and then a double tombstone finish. Nothing was teased regarding what Undertaker would do next or for Mania, but if it is Lesnar, which it was as of a few weeks ago, it would make no sense at all to do it now.

To say the show has led to an increase in interest in WWE is putting it mildly. Ratings, below usual levels all year, have been up ever since they started the build for this. WWE has had a lot of shows in recent years where they've ramped up the media, and sometimes it helps a little, other times it seems to make little difference. They've brought back stars from the past all the time, to the point that it shouldn't make a difference and the last time they did it for Smackdown the number was a disappointment. But that also didn't include Rock, but it's not like ratings were through the roof with Rock or Brock Lesnar's return in recent months.

The show did a 3.86 rating over the three hours, and averaged 6.04 million viewers, the most viewers ever for a three-hour show. The show averaged a 4.03 rating and 6.31 million viewers over the final two hours, although with the show now going three hours weekly, final two hours numbers aren't as relevant. It was the highest rated Raw since June 22, 2009, when a commercial free Raw (and that really makes comparisons unfair) with Donald Trump did a 4.53 rating and 6.81 million viewers; a show which had segments top 8 million viewers). It

should also be noted that a week after that show, WWE produced a PPV that did at the time the second lowest numbers of any PPV in the previous decade, and there was no positive business momentum from that show past the idea that they did one excellent rating.

WWE sent out a press release, evidently not realizing about the Trump show, as they proclaimed the final two hours as the most watched regular two hours of Raw in more than ten years. You could argue it was more impressive to do the number they did on a show with commercials, and it was, but it was not the highest viewing audience for Raw in ten years. There were segments on the Trump show that topped 8 million viewers while on this show nothing topped 7 million. But it was the highest except for the Trump show since WWE came back to the USA Network from Spike in 2005.

But the show was a huge success because they had 5.58 million viewers already tuned in for the start of the show, meaning all the plugs about three hours largely worked and the audience is already aware of the new start time. The rating was actually in a sense deceptively low, because they had 1.58 viewers per home, a number that dates back to the kind of levels the show did in its glory days.

In the segment-by-segment, the DX segment opened so strong that the second quarter gain with the end of the segment where they tossed out Damien Sandow gained 27,000 viewers. Rey Mysterio & Sin Cara & Sheamus vs. Alberto Del Rio & Dolph Ziggler & Chris Jericho with a Charlie Sheen interview lost 395,000 viewers. Brodus Clay vs. Jack Swagger and a bunch of backstage stuff involving legends gained 326,000 viewers. It's pretty clear this was a show where people were tuning in to see guys who aren't on the roster. The wedding at 9 p.m., when you would expect several hundred thousand to tune in, gained 616,000 to a 3.91 rating. The Rock coming out with Bryan and Punk in the ring gained 575,000 viewers to a 4.28. Christian vs. The Miz lost 895,000 viewers, but given the gains in the prior segments and that people were not watching for the current wrestlers, that shouldn't be a surprise. The segment with HHH (his third already on the show) with Paul Heyman and Stephanie McMahon gained 334,000 viewers. Brock Lesnar's brawl with HHH gained 90,000 viewers. The big thing to show the nostalgia lure is the Heath Slater segment with all the legends, that would be expected to lose a ton of viewers after Lesnar and HHH, gained 25,000 viewers, and did 3.99 quarter in a time slot that usually loses big, and beat both HHH/Stephanie/Heyman segment and the HHH/Lesnar brawl. Undertaker's return gained 293,000 viewers. And the Punk vs. Cena with Rock and Show doing the run-in gained 389,000 viewers and peaked the show with a 4.43 overrun. It's not a gigantic overrun gain, but when the audience is already so large, and watching consistently, there probably isn't room for a ton of gain. The last segment did a 5.6 among teenage boys.

Overall in the demos, the show did a 4.8 in teenage boys (up 41%), 3.6 in Males 18-49 (up 16%), 2.4 in Teenage girls (up 33%) and 1.8 in Women 18-49 (up 100%). You would expect the women numbers up due to the wedding, but the wedding was over by 9:15 p.m. Overall the audience was 67.1% male.

The show also had nearly triple the amount of social media activity as the week before and more than any episode of Raw in history. Usually there is more social media activity surrounding Love & Hip Hop Atlanta on VH-1 on Mondays, but this week Raw almost doubled it. Again, what that means when you spend the show telling people to do something, which no other show does to that degree, it's something to brag about. However, nothing related to WWE was among the top searched items on Google, which is the only trending metric that has historically shown to be any kind of a predictor of business. The rating, as the last show to beat this number showed, doesn't guarantee anything going forward, but getting Sheen for SummerSlam and shooting the Punk angle (leading to one main event) and Lesnar angle (leading to the other) in front of so many viewers should pay dividends.

The first segment with Rock, Bryan and Punk was really the most impressive if you consider the time slot it aired in. It did a 5.7 with teenage boys, 4.0 with Men 18-49, 2.3 in Teenage girls and 2.0 in Women 18-49. Plus, if you are going to start being hot, the teenage audience is the quickest to sway both up and down, because the adult audience is harder to move and more stable. They've had a strong

increase in teenagers watching for the last month, far and away growing more than the audience itself at large.

The show also drew a sellout 18,318 fans, and about 15,000 paid in St. Louis for the show.

Far more important than the ratings, which will be forgotten in a week, is that before their largest possible audience, they shot the Punk heel turn, but did it in a way that should help next week's number because you were left with curiosity as to why and without the interview explanation. Punk is likely to have to turn hard on the fans because he's likely programmed back with Cena, and that dynamic not done carefully can lead to Punk being cheered. The key was screwing with the Money in the Bank, something people think they can count on, and the brilliance of messing with the people's elbow spot. Plus, the "not helping" as opposed to turning and watching someone else do the dirty work was more effective. If he would have simply turned and done a heel move to beat Cena, the normal turn method, he would have been cheered like crazy by a decent segment of the audience. And there were a few cheers when he nailed Rock, but they were a distinct minority.

There were 6.93 million people watching when Punk turned, 6.69 million watching when Rock announced his title challenge at the Rumble, and 6.22 million watching when HHH and Lesnar did their angle for the SummerSlam main event. So whatever the reason people came to see the show, in the key segments, they shot the most important angles for their next three major shows, as well as the angle for hooking people for next week's show. While there were no great matches, and really, no great promos either, the show was brilliantly put together for future business.

I don't know that this was a Pat Patterson angle idea, but in the 70s, when Pat Patterson and Don Muraco were the top two babyfaces in San Francisco, there was a heel beatdown on Patterson and instead of Muraco joining in as would be the traditional turn, he just stood there, didn't leave, but didn't help, which was actually far more effective. Because it was the only angle of that type for years, while the usual No. 2 face going heel is done all the time, it was more effective and memorable than most.

The show started with Superstars matches, so even with three hour shows they are going to tape some Superstars stuff:

1. Tyson Kidd & Justin Gabriel beat Curt Hawkins & Tyler Reks when Kidd came off the top rope and pinned Reks.

2. Zack Ryder pinned Michael McGillicutty with the Rough Ryder.

Raw opened with Vince McMahon coming out and thanking the fans for supporting the show. This led to a "Thank you Vince" chant from the fans. He introduced DX. Michael Cole talked about how DX debuted on August 11, 1997, which was one of the key factors in turning around the Monday Night Wars. He credited the Attitude era to starting on that date.

Michaels came out acting all blown up from the ring entrance. The two did their usual tongue-in-cheek comedy banter. The main joke was that they were out there and missing something, and Michaels said that he knew he remembered to put on his underwear because it was bunching up. HHH said he also remembered to put on his underwear. Then they teased the idea of the other members. It was pretty clear by the reaction that the crowd expected it, and Gunn, Road Dogg and Waltman came out in a military jeep with camouflage and helmets with the idea of recreating the night that DX invaded WCW. I still to this day can't believe how badly WCW screwed up that day by choking under pressure. It was also funny that Road Dogg and Gunn tried to reprise that in their anti-DX angle while in TNA that nobody talks about, where they kept challenging Michael and Paul to a shoot fight. This segment was exactly what it should have been, with them teasing the catch phrases everyone wanted them to do. They did have the two "suck it" references, but Road Dogg called Gunn "the Bad bleep Billy Gunn," as I guess the word "ass" was forbidden. Weird since badass is used all

the time to describe tough guys on every wrestling show including Raw, but "suck it" would to me seem more likely something they'd avoid. They joked about Michaels losing his smile and posing for Playgirl. Michaels joked that posing was stupid but he needed the money. They stalled it out and before they could get to the climax of the segment (getting the fans to chant "suck it"), out came Damien Sandow.

I thought it was cool to get him screen time but he was also treated like a Spirit Squad geek. Sandow said that DX were, "Common degenerates whose sophomoric and disgusting behavior has plagued humanity and brainwashed the masses into doing cross conduct." Michaels then joked that he'd be going straight to church after this to ask for forgiveness, again. Sandow said they could eviscerate him like common trash, but then he won't be a victim, he'll be a martyr. So DX went into a huddle, broke the huddle called the play, and Michaels superkicked him and HHH gave him the pedigree. So in the end, they eviscerated him like common trash, but they did not make him a martyr. Gunn then led the crowd in the old, "If you're not down with that, I've got two words for ya."

Jim Ross came out to announce a match.

3. Rey Mysterio & Sin Cara & Sheamus beat Chris Jericho & Dolph Ziggler & Alberto Del Rio in 4:11. They never explained why Jericho and Ziggler were teaming after they did the angle last week, but pushed they were having problems. Jericho teased being a babyface with his facials. The finish saw Jericho go for a springboard dropkick on Sheamus, but Ziggler punched him from the outside and he was stunned enough for Sheamus to hit the Brogue kick for the win. Ross departed after this match.

They did a plug for Tout and had some fans give brief comments. That was TNA fan level bad. Charlie Sheen established himself with his first segment on Skype.

Backstage, A.J. was getting ready for her wedding. She was talking to Layla, who was all dressed up. Layla was paying no attention to her and questioned her about marrying Bryan and thought she was nuts. A.J. said that everyone here is nuts, and then opened the door to see Duggan walking around with a 2x4, Piper and R-Truth holding the jump rope for the imaginary Little Jimmy and Mae Young showing up with a guy in a hand costume with the idea the hand she gave birth to in 1998 being all grown up.

4. Brodus Clay pinned Jack Swagger with a splash in :15. They pushed that Swagger was on a losing streak. Clay had a new white Stars & Stripes outfit. The man should not be wearing white because it makes him look out of shape, or more out of shape. Dude Love came out to dance with Clay and put the Mr. Socko claw on Swagger.

HHH and Stratus were backstage doing the spoof on the segment they did about a decade ago. Instead of Stephanie walking in, it was DX, who thought they saw something they weren't supposed to see. HHH explained it wasn't what they thought and everyone left except Stratus and Waltman. Waltman went to hit on Stratus, the segment ended, and we'll probably never know what happened unless both return for the 2,000th Raw.

It was wedding time. Slick, who went into religion after leaving WWF, presided over it. They said Slick was a groundbreaking trailblazer, the first African-American manager in WWE history. Believe it or not, the first African-American manager I'm aware of in company history would have been James Dudley, who very briefly managed babyface African-Americans in Washington, DC. They announced that 74% of the fans polled say A.J. shouldn't marry him. Well, they saw it coming. Lawler was doing all kinds of marriage jokes. "A man doesn't know true happiness until he gets married. And then it's too late." Slick was getting the "What" treatment from the audience. I'm usually not in favor of torture or capital punishment but people should be locked up giving Slick the "What" treatment with as over-the-top as he was playing this. To make it even sillier, Slick was so out there that A.J. couldn't stop laughing and stay in character. Bryan seemed like he was able to at least bite his lip because he wanted to crack up but didn't. When Slick

asked if anyone has a reason for these two not to be wed, to speak now or forever hold their peace, Bryan was looking at the back waiting for the same run-in everyone was expecting from Punk or Kane. Fans were booing this and chanting "No." Bryan said "Yes," A.J. said "Yes," but before they were pronounced man and wife, A.J. said that she wasn't saying yes to Bryan. She was saying yes to someone else who made a proposal to her earlier in the show. Out came Vince, who explained that he did not ask A.J. to marry him. Obviously, that wouldn't be good given the senate race. He offered her a business proposal that she accepted and A.J. is the new General Manager of Raw. Don't attempt to make sense that someone portrayed as a vindictive and totally mentally unstable woman would be offered a power position, because this is wrestling. So A.J. dumped him at the altar and started skipping around, and yes, she was wearing tennis shoes under her wedding dress. Bryan was mad and tore up the wedding backdrop.

After the break, Bryan was still in the ring. He said he was not leaving the ring. Punk came out and made fun of him. Punk told Bryan that after all this time of him treating A.J. so well, what did you think would happen and now she's your boss as G.M. of Raw. Bryan got mad at Punk, saying that Punk is not the best in the world, and he's not even the best in the ring. Bryan said that not only is he better than Punk, but he's the greatest WWE superstar of all-time.

This led to Rock showing up. Rock went to Bryan and said that "You don't get to say who the greatest of all-time is, they get to say it," referring to the fans. Well, isn't Punk the guy also saying it. And Jericho. Bryan and Rock interrupted each other. Rock brought up that he won his first WWE title in St. Louis. He announced he would be challenging whoever the WWE champion is at the Royal Rumble. Punk said that he was going to beat Cena and actually got booed saying it. Bryan said that if Rock was challenging at the Rumble, he would be Rock's opponent. The segment ended with Rock picking up Bryan and laying him out with a rock bottom.

Bret Hart came out as the ring announcer. He put over the IC title, saying one of his greatest career memories was the first time he won the IC title beating Mr. Perfect.

5. The Miz pinned Christian to win the IC title in 7:37. They pretty much had to change the title here because you needed a switch on this show, even if it got buried in interest compared to everything else. Christian did a plancha and spent the rest of the match selling his left knee. During the commercial break, Miz also whipped him into the ring steps and he took it on his knee. He's still did most of his spots off the top rope, but would shake the left knee and never forget about it. They were reversing out of each others' finish when Christian flipped over, landed on his feet and the knee went out again. Miz used the Skull crushing finale for the clean pin. Match was solid but the crowd didn't react at all to the match. But they did pop big for the title change.

Another Charlie Sheen segment making fun of Bryan. That segment sucked.

Next was a video segment with Regis Philbin. Philbin talked about how he's been a fan forever. Philbin started as a TV host in San Diego and would have wrestlers like Freddie Blassie and The Destroyer on to promote their matches. He showed a photo with Destroyer and talked about him being the first wrestler he interviewed and put him over, which is a surprise since Destroyer was never a WWF guy. He also talked about having Blassie, Sgt. Slaughter, Cena and Rock on.

HHH came out and called out Lesnar. Instead, he got Heyman. He asked Heyman if Lesnar would accept his challenge for SummerSlam. Given that TV commercials for the match started airing over the weekend, I guess he was going to have to. Heyman said "No" in a smarmy way. HHH confronted him and Heyman threatened him with a third lawsuit. HHH called Lesnar a coward. Heyman then started laughing at him and saying how now he's resorting to name calling and asked if that's the kind of example he wants to set for his children. HHH told Heyman not to talk about his family or his kids. Heyman made a remark about feeling sorry for his children.

Stephanie showed up and told Heyman not to talk about her kids. Then it got weird. Stephanie went off on Heyman, saying that Heyman masks all his failures as a businessman, his failures at WCW, his failures at ECW, and his failures at WWE. Whoa, isn't this angle about Lesnar vs. HHH, not about I'm sick of who say Heyman has a great creative mind, and think he's smarter than me or my father?

Reverting back to reality, since this was Stephanie publicly trying to get her frustrations out because of all the past issues she's had over the years with Heyman. When Heyman was on the WWE creative team, even though Heyman was always charming and put her over, she never trusted him and things would build up and have blow-outs. If you talked with members of the creative team in that era, you had the one group that swore by Heyman and thought he was a genius, and invariably, they hated Stephanie. You had the people who liked Stephanie, and thought Heyman knew nothing. And then you had the people who were amused being in the middle.

Stephanie went off on how her father was so much more creative than Heyman ever was. She got back into storyline by saying her father had the guts to fight HHH, and Lesnar won't accept the match. Stephanie told Heyman that his own kids were ashamed of him, ashamed to be his children because their father was a professional parasite, and then slapped him. Heyman then agreed to Lesnar doing the match. He then paused and applauded her saying that he fell for it, like he got outworked but she wasn't serious. Then she attacked Heyman and started beating on him. This brought out Lesnar.

HHH had Stephanie leave the ring and Lesnar and HHH went at it in a back-and-forth brawl which ended with HHH clotheslining Lesnar over the top rope. The brawl was good. Lesnar is going to be on TV weekly so there's plenty of time for him to shine, and HHH should have gotten the better of it if they were going to do something physical given he's the babyface coming back from the broken arm, even if HHH didn't do much of a job selling it.

More touts. Not good. They did an Austin vs. McMahon video, since you can't really tell the history of Raw without talking about that feud.

Howard Finkel came out for ring intros. Santino Marella and Hornswoggle were out with "Brawling Buddies," promoting a new stuffed action figure line.

6. Heath Slater came out for the segment where he gets beat up by all the legends. Lawler said that Slater can't start a fire in his house because he's lost all his matches. Michael Cole noted that Slater beat Doink. Slater challenged anyone from the back to face him in a no DQ, no count out match. Lita came out, and didn't get that big of a pop. She said she brought out protection. No, she didn't start throwing condoms at him. The old APA music came out and John Layfield and Ron Simmons came out in jeans doing their APA gimmick. Slater went to leave. Then Vader, Vicious, Doink, Slaughter, Backlund, Road Warrior Animal, DDP, Rikishi and Piper all came out and blocked him from leaving. Slater got thrown in the ring. Lita used a twist of fate on him and Layfield did his old clothesline from hell which Slater sold great. Lita hit the moonsault. The time of the match was only :33. The segment ended with all the legends in the ring, Slater laid out and Simmons saying "Damn."

Mooney interviewed Bryan, who challenged Sheen.

They interviewed Alex Guerrero Jr. of San Antonio, saying he was the 100,000,000th social media follower of WWE. You figure some people are being counted like 20 times. He did better on camera than you'd expect. If he wasn't coached, they should be very happy, and if he was, they were very smart to do so.

Fuzzy Bear of the Muppets introduced a video segment on catch phrases.

Zack Ryder, Gene Okerlund and Cena were backstage. Ryder said that he figured out it was Okerlund behind GTV (one of those old Raw angles that was pushed forever and never had a conclusion). Okerlund

said that it wasn't true and he was working in WCW at the time. Rock showed up and Ryder and Okerlund left. Rock wished Cena good luck in his match and Cena said how he would look forward to a rematch.

Kane hit the ring for a match with Jinder Mahal. But Mahal came out with Hawkins, Reks, Hunico, Camacho and McIntyre. They all surrounded the ring. Undertaker's music played. Instead of five guys attacking Kane, and fleeing since it takes Undertaker forever to get to the ring, they all nicely jumped out of the ring until he got there. Undertaker & Kane cleaned house on all five, knocking three out of the ring, and choke slamming and tombstoning Hawkins and Hunico. As noted, this was the first time I've ever seen Undertaker where he physically looked like an old man. He also needed help from officials to take his jacket off, so his shoulders must have been destroyed in that last match. That was what I noticed was how small his shoulders looked compared to just a few months ago. They shot the other wrestlers while they helped Undertaker take the jacket off.

Sheen was back again, talking about wanting to fight Bryan in Los Angeles. The live crowd didn't care about Sheen at all, and by the second time he was on the screen, the crowd was booing him. Lawler then noted Los Angeles is where SummerSlam is.

7. John Cena beat C.M. Punk in 11:08 via DQ. Cena cashed in the briefcase but Punk retained the WWE title. After a ref bump, Cena gave Punk the Attitude Adjustment, but no ref to count the pin. Show then came in and speared Cena. Punk sat in the corner and Show paused forever, and hit Cena with the knockout punch. It was played up like Punk was laid out from the Attitude Adjustment and they didn't act like he should have saved Cena as he was still hurt. Punk started acting confused. He went to revive the ref but Cena kicked out of the pin. Punk freaked out at this point. Punk picked Cena up for the GTS, but Cena escaped and turned it into the STF. Punk was in trouble and about to tap when Show ran in and attacked Cena for the DQ. Show was beating on Cena. At this point, Lawler made mention that Punk should be helping Cena and he's just sitting there. Punk was doing nothing but acting like he didn't know what he should do. Show kept beating on Cena until Rock made the save. What was interesting is that before Mania, the last thing anyone would have wanted to see was Rock make a save for Cena, but here, they cheered it. Rock hit the spinebuster on Show and went for the people's elbow, but Punk ran in and laid out Rock with a running clothesline. Punk then laid out Rock with the GTS. Punk got some cheers standing over Rock and Cena, but mostly boos, and they went off the air at that point.

When the show went off the air, Punk left. Rock and Cena recovered while Show was still selling the spinebuster. Rock gave Show the People's elbow and Cena gave Show the Attitude Adjustment. Fans were chanting a lot for Austin at this point. During the show there were several chants for Austin, particularly when Slater came out. Some people thought it weird how Rock and Cena were acting buddy buddy after being in such a big program for Mania.

Regarding a lot of the names that were rumored to be on Raw that weren't there, when the show was written, they made calls to approximately 25 people who had at first been set to be on the show, canceling them. They were a lot of mid-card level guys who were not the usual cast of people brought in with maybe a few who have been brought in.

There was another women's segment written into the show that was pulled because a lot of the early segments ran short. That explains the complete absence of the current women aside from A.J. and the one brief segment with Layla. I believe Kelly was originally written into that segment.

Right before the wedding segment, they showed Bryan backstage with some guys in white outfits. The idea looks to have been that once Bryan married her, he was going to have her committed and thus she'd be out of his hair, but instead, she wound up has his boss.

Given that Jericho will never say anything publicly about his comings and goings, but with him not advertised for TV's after SummerSlam, the belief is that he'll be leaving shortly, at least for a while.

There was talk with the success of the legends segments and the Raw 1,000th show of having one former star brought back on every Raw.

In our piece last week talking about the history of wrestling and television and its many phases, Irv Muchnick noted that a huge factor not mentioned was the deregulation of television standards at the FCC level during the Reagan Administration.

This tied in with the emergence of cable television, since part of the argument for deregulation is that new technologies were making regulation unnecessary.

What happened is FCC chairman Mark Fowler gutted a lot of the restrictions on commercializing air time. There were far more regulations on what television stations could do, and limits of how much advertising could be put in an hour and advertising had to be labeled as such.

When logging wrestling shows, the advertising during the show had to be logged as such. It created a situation where during a wrestling television show from a legal standpoint, the announcers couldn't talk about the upcoming card (advertising) during the body of matches and such. Of course, that was ignored in many places. But in other places, it was what kept separate hyping matches from the body of the show. A lot of this came from a mid-70s incident in Los Angeles, as the promotion had been warned about keeping the promotional activity from the body of the broadcast. I believe it was Greg Valentine, who had a main event match which may have been with Jack Brisco for the world title, but the specifics don't matter, where Valentine was doing a regular interview, as opposed to an interview that would be logged as a commercial, and told not to hype his match but do a generic interview. Well, looking to hype the gate since he was in a main event he was getting a percentage of, he went into business, the wrong guy was watching, and the entire NWA was being watched by the government.

The elimination of these regulations allowed wrestling companies far more leeway, such as things like product placement, showing people wearing T-shirts and merchandise during the broadcast that was clearly commercialization that wouldn't have been allowed in the prior era. It was a key factor that allowed wrestling to change because the TV show, while always really a promotional tool for house shows, had to balance and limit the hyping of matches, ticket sales, and interviews building the shows to a limited amount of time per show. Once these regulations were removed, there was far more leeway for a promotion to use the body of its television show to promote shows and products.

Regarding the history of the World Championship Wrestling TV show, here is the back story.

The TV show Live Atlanta Wrestling started from 6-7:30 p.m. in Atlanta in the mid-50s, perhaps 1955, with Ed Capral as the main host.

During the 60s, the show was cut back to one hour because they would run house shows starting at 8 p.m. in Marietta on Saturday nights and guys were cutting it too close in getting to the building.

Around 1971, the station moved the show to 11 p.m. and with the show no longer being live, they had a problem since Atlanta was a Friday night city, but the station wanted the Saturday night show taped earlier in the week. That meant they would have to have a card, and promote a card on Saturday night taped before the prior card on Friday. If you understand the concept of how things can go wrong, that leads to continuity issues.

It was at this period when Ray Gunkel cut the deal with Ted Turner to move the show to WTCG (which became WTBS). At the time it was a risk going to a smaller UHF station, but back in the more familiar 6 p.m. Saturday time slot. Capral ended up leaving ABC Promotions for Ann Gunkel's All South Wrestling when everyone else left in 1972, and his tenure in wrestling ended when All South Wrestling was closed down.

Gordon Solie's run as the voice of Atlanta wrestling dated back to late 1972, I think it was actually a few weeks or maybe a month or two after Capral left. There were other people who hosted the shows before Eddie Graham pushed for Solie.

Solie had been the voice of Championship Wrestling from Florida dating back to whenever that show started and in 1972 had the reputation of being the best wrestling announcer in the country. Still, in a little known fact, Jim Barnett, when he took over GCW in 1974, was not that fond of Solie as announcer, feeling he cost more than he was worth, but he never got rid of him.

Solie was so synonymous with GCW that in 1984, when Vince McMahon purchased the company, and in doing so, took over the production to the television show, there was such a big protest that it was covered as both a regional and national news story in some places. The main complaint of the people who phoned TBS complaining about the new wrestling show (which immediately started a ratings decline) was that they wanted "Gordon Solie wrestling."

Ted Turner almost immediately created an early Saturday morning show where former GCW G.M. Ole Anderson restarted a new company, Championship Wrestling from Georgia, and gave him a slot on TBS, with Solie as announcer.

As you can imagine, Vince McMahon was furious since he had just spent \$750,000 to get a time slot on the station, and while he had the familiar slot to the fans, Turner had just given his opposition a slot on the same station for free.

But with the early morning slot and depletion of talent since Anderson couldn't compete, and Championship Wrestling from Georgia only lasted one year, closing when Jim Crockett Jr. purchased the rights to the good time slot from McMahon in 1985.

When Crockett Jr. made the deal, TBS gave him exclusivity, leading to the end of Anderson's group (Anderson and the bigger names moved on to work for Crockett but Anderson no longer had any power, but it did lead to his run as part of the original Four Horsemen) as well as the departure of Bill Watts' Mid South Wrestling from the station even with Mid South Wrestling at the time being the highest rated show on cable television (getting a 5.3 average rating) at the time.

Ratings on TBS, which declined under McMahon, continued to decline steadily under Crockett.

When Crockett purchased the time slot, he decided to go with Tony Schiavone as announcer instead of Solie, which was a very bold move at the time. Solie was clearly past his prime as an announcer in 1985 (Solie of the early 70s was one of the greats but he was a heavy drinker and his work had declined years earlier), but he still had the longstanding reputation as the best in the business to the point it was considered a given that he was, even though it had been years since that was the case.

After TBS purchased the company from Crockett in 1988, they brought back Solie, but it was never as the lead play-by-play man, as TBS first went with Jim Ross. First it was a combination of Schiavone and Ross, and then when they made the call to go with Ross on his own. Schiavone was mad and left WCW and took a job with WWE.

But his family didn't like the Northeast, and he soon asked to come back to WCW. When Ross fell into political manure with the Bill Watts fallout, he was taken off the air and Schiavone was given the lead spot, which he maintained until WCW folded in 2001. Ross then moved on to various tenures in WWE/E.